

## Shingles Vaccine

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Each year one million Americans develop a painful condition from a common childhood illness – but a simple vaccination can protect against this disease.

Shingles is a painful skin rash that is caused by the varicella zoster virus (VZV) – the same virus that causes chickenpox. VZV remains in the nerve cells of the body after the chickenpox infection clears and can reappear years later, causing shingles. Anyone who has had chickenpox can develop shingles, but it is more common in people 50 years old or older, people who have suppressed immune systems and people on immunosuppressive drugs. Usually a person only gets shingles once, but in some rare cases, a person may get it a second or even a third time.

Shingles usually starts with pain and itching or tingling skin, followed by a painful skin rash with blisters. The blisters are usually found in a small area on one side of the body, often on the face or trunk. They scab over after 3 to 5 days, and the rash usually clears up within 2 to 4 weeks.

Besides the pain, itching and rash, people may also experience a fever, headache, chills and an upset stomach. Approximately 20 percent of people who have shingles will also develop severe pain, even after the rash is gone. This is called post-herpetic neuralgia. Older adults are more likely to develop post-herpetic neuralgia, and it is more likely to be severe. In very rare occasions, shingles can lead to pneumonia, hearing problems, blindness, brain swelling (encephalitis) or death.

The Zostavax vaccine works to reduce the risk of shingles and the pain caused by it in people who are 60 or older. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recently recommended a single dose of Zostavax for people who are 60 and older.

People with suppressed immune systems should not receive the vaccine. If there is any question about eligibility, individuals should contact their health care provider for a recommendation.

Shingles is **not** spread to other people through sneezing, coughing or casual contact. However, the virus that causes shingles can be spread to people who have never had chickenpox if they come into contact with the shingles blisters. They would develop chickenpox, not shingles. Blisters that have scabbed over can not spread the virus.

The best way to prevent spreading the virus is to keep the blisters covered. People who have shingles should not touch or scratch the rash and should wash their hands often. Other people should avoid touching the blisters.

The Zostavax vaccine is offered by appointment only at the health department's Westside Public Health Center, located at 660 S. Scenic. Each dose costs \$168.00. Individuals may apply to Medicare part D for reimbursement. For more information, or to make an appointment, call (417) 874-1220.